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Baron Larrey (1766-1842): Napoleon's Chief Surgeon and His Times

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DOMINIQUE JEAN LARREY, Baron of the Empire, Commander of the Legion of Honour, Inspector-General of the Medical Staff of the French Armies, Chief Surgeon of the Grand Army, and First Surgeon of the Imperial Guard, was born in 1766, three years before Napoleon Bonoparte, whose loving follower Larrey was destined to become. His birthplace was in the romantic region of the High Pyrenees, at the village of Beaudeau.

At the period of Larrey's birth, centuries of misrule were about to culminate in a mighty catastrophe for France. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, France was the most powerful nation in Europe. Under Louis XIV, she had threatened to dominate the whole Continent, but her advance had been checked largely by the genius of Marlborough. From twenty years of aggression her finances had never recovered. Though with her virile, ingenious people, France's capacity to recover financial equilibrium seemed self-evident, her every effort to do so failed. The blame was laid at the door of the aristocrats, whose privileges alone seemed to stand between the nation and a happier future.

All power was centred in the throne, and the once turbulent nobles of France lived lives of dissipation around the palace of Versailles. Increased privilege was the price which the sovereigns of France had paid the Nobility for the loss of ancient powers—privilege, not to do but to receive. Everything went by favour and not by merit; the nobles thronged Versailles, leaving their estates in utter neglect and ruin, and permitting their peasants to starve and rot. The people, in the words of Macauley, were "beasts of burden, and were soon to become beasts of prey."

In these times the French peasant had to work for his lord two or three days in each week, he had to pay a proportion of his produce to the Church; and finally there were the King's Taxes, the Land Tax, the Poll Tax, and certain indirect taxes, such as the tax on salt, which the peasants were forced to buy at a large price. The King had a monopoly of this commodity and each year some ten thousand of the peasantry were imprisoned, two thousand condemned to the galleys, and several hundred executed for offences against the salt laws alone.

As has been said, "At this time there were trees growing in the forest, out of which the frame of the guillotine was to be made." It must have been evident to all thoughtful minds in 1766, that Jean Jaques Rousseau spoke the truth when he said, "This is an age of revolutions."

Larrey, like many great men, was born poor. His parents were too poverty-stricken to pay for his education; and what instruction he got was obtained gratuitously from the Abbé de Grasset, a good and kindly churchman, who had originally become interested in the boy, because he possessed a good voice and sang in the choir. When Larrey was thirteen years of age his father died, and the son went to Toulouse to live with his uncle, Alexis Larrey, Chief Surgeon to a large hospital in that city. Larrey attended the hospital, and at 15 was appointed dresser, and after that House Surgeon. In 1787, at the age of 21, furnished with letters of introduction, he started to walk to Paris, alongside a slow-moving wagon. Larrey was a typical southern Frenchman, short, round-headed, stoutly built, a first-rate marcher, impervious to fatigue.

Soon after reaching Paris, he took a public examination, and obtained an appointment as Auxiliary Surgeon in the navy. He walked to the great naval station at Brest, underwent another examination, and was assigned to the "Vigilante." As the ship was not to sail for some months, Larrey passed the time in lecturing to students in anatomy and surgery, an instance of that fiery activity that possessed him all his life. The newly-appointed Surgeon sailed from Brest to Newfoundland in April, 1788, and was gone six months on his trip. Sea-sickness early convinced Larrey that any talents he might possess would be more easily developed elsewhere than in the navy, and upon his return in October of the same year he arranged to retire from active service. The voyage was not without many interesting happenings, none of which escaped his restless curiosity. In his notes he discusses sea-sickness, frost-bite, the Eskimos, plumage of birds in the Arctic zone, mosquito-bites, and, like him, we also wonder as to the fruits of the ill-mated love affair between a cow and a caribou that forced its way into the fold! Larrey reached Brest on his return journey in October, 1788, and was glad to set foot on land. For several days all hands were suffering from want of provisions; "there remained only a little brandy, and a cow-in-calf, very thin."

Soon afterwards he proceeded to Paris and was there at the beginning of the memorable winter of 1789. He worked at the Hotel Dieu, under the orders of the celebrated Surgeon Desault. It was at this hospital, and at the Hotel Royal des Invalides, that Larrey acquired knowledge sufficient to enable him to serve

with credit three years later in the Army of the Rhine. A hospital colleague of Desault at this time was Chopart, still remembered in these days for his amputation at the mid-tarsal joint. At the Invalides, Larrey saw Sabatier at work. This surgeon is the man who advocated suturing a divided intestine over a cylinder made of a playing card. Desault is particularly remembered for his circular amputation of three incisions, a cone being thus made, the apex of which is the divided bone. At the height of his fame six hundred pupils attended his clinics.

In digression, I may be permitted to make a short resumé of the political situation in France, which led up to Larrey's first military experience —the Campaign of the Rhine in 1792.

In the atmosphere of angry suspicion which prevailed in Paris after the 1789 revolution, one of the chief enemies of the revolution appeared to the Assembly, which was then governing France, to be Leopold the Austrian Emperor, brother of Marie Antoinette. Nothing was more likely to make the position of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette impossible than a foreign war against this brother of the Queen. Pretexts for a war were not lacking. Leopold could complain of French encouragement to a revolution in Belgium, which was then part of the Austrian Netherlands, and Marie Antoinette, then a prisoner of the revolution in the Tuilleries, was entreating her brother Leopold to summon a European Congress to deal with the French revolution. Leopold, in conjunction with the King of Prussia, issued a declaration which seemed to threaten France with the combined action of the European powers, if Louis was not accorded the treatment which his status deserved. Marie Antoinette saw in an unsuccessful defence against foreign invasion, the one chance for the salvation of her husband's crown.

Leopold unexpectedly died and his successor Francis, young, vigorous and carefree, was prompt to take up the challenge of the Revolutionaries. Though the French Army was disorganized, and Austria and Prussia were leagued against them, the French were confident of victory, and Louis XVI was compelled to declare war in May, 1792. The result was what might be expected. The first hostile exchanges were sufficient to show that the revolution had no army upon which it could rely for the defence of the country.

It was during this period of uncertainty, when the old Army had proved itself incompetent, and before the new volunteers of the revolution had proven their worth that the fate of the monarchy was decided. How, it was asked, could the war be made to succeed whilst Louis and his wife, friends of the enemy so it was believed, were giving secret encouragement to the invader. Eventually, after many vicissitudes, and due largely to Danton and the Marseilles revolutionaries, the Austrians were defeated in November, 1792, with Austrian Belgium as a desirable acquisition. As it was a settled policy of Britain never willingly to acquiesce in the annexation of Belgium by a great continental power, Britain was drawn into the fight by France declaring war in February, 1793—a

war which lasted twenty-two years with a short interval until the defeat of the French at Waterloo in 1815.

It was during this campaign of the Rhine that Larrey, painfully impressed by the utter lack of system in caring for the wounded, conceived the idea of organized effort on military lines to give immediate and adequate succour to the victims of battles. Usually the wounded remained where they fell until fighting was over, rarely receiving surgeons' attention until twenty-four hours had passed. In cases of defeat they were abandoned. Larrey decided the surgeon ought to go to the wounded, and that aid must be a matter of routine and administered with the same status as any other military measure. He deemed the hospital provisions, three miles in the rear, as called for by Army Regulations, wholly inadequate.

Larrey arranged a systematized service of ambulances and movable hospitals or dressing stations as an integral part of the Army as a whole. His "Ambulances Volantes," or flying ambulances, were placed under the control of the Chief Surgeon of the Army. They consisted of various medical divisions; the divisions being a unit to meet the needs of a military division. These units could be multiplied as required; if divisions were combined to form Army Corps, or subdivided to serve brigades and smaller formations.

The administrative work of a medical division was handled in two sections. One was composed of a commissary and two subordinates, 12 mounted and 25 unmounted sick attendants, all soldiers, and a drummer. The other section consisted of 12 light carriages and 4 heavy vehicles, each with a man in charge, and a driver, a horse-shoer, and a bugler. The personnel of a medical division numbered 113 persons, and included a directing surgeon and 15 junior surgeons of different ranks. The light vehicles drawn by one or two horses were on springs, furnished with mattresses, padded, with pockets for supplies. They collected the wounded and evacuated them to heavy wagons, which bore them to the principal dressing station, or hospital beyond the battle area. The serious cases were attended to where they fell, and emergency surgery was done under fire. This "division" may fairly claim to be the first efficient field ambulance in the history of war.

This scheme was put to the test for the first time during the operations before Metz in 1793, and gave such general satisfaction that Larrey was eventually ordered to Paris to assemble the necessary ambulance units for fourteen armies of the Republic.

Larrey's experience in this campaign led him to advocate immediate amputation in certain grave injuries of the extremities—a view that he never abandoned. His practice of immediate amputation—incidentally, it should be remembered, that there were no nurses, no anæsthetics — was an essential life-saving operation, under the conditions in which he worked. Amputated immediately the man could fend for himself, and he could forage for food. If it were an arm which he had lost he could walk off back towards France, or if it were a leg he

could be put on a horse and ride stage by stage on the way home. In spite of moving about, Larrey's cases escaped secondary hæmorrhage.

A factor in his success was that the wounded came under him directly after the injury, because he was always close behind the fighting; in the shelter of a trench under the walls of Acre, behind a sand dune at Aboukir, in a barn just behind the line of Guards holding Eylau. During a lull in the fighting he was seen by Wellington at Waterloo.

The first marked success by Larrey was on 30th March, 1793, on the height of Alzez, in the Palatinate, when on a cold day he did immediate amputation on seven cases and all recovered.

A case in the Army of the Rhine was that of a Captain Buffy of the Artillery. His right arm was struck by a cannon ball on the elbow. Without falling off his horse he continued to command for ten minutes, until the firing of his guns had silenced the enemy. Then Larrey amputated his arm, and he forthwith mounted his horse and returned to his battery. He had healed on the twenty-fifth day, whilst continuing on active service in the field.

Another case of immediate amputation, which can be quoted among the many, was that of General Silly, aged 60, at the second battle of Aboukir on 21st March, 1801. This officer's leg had been nearly shot off below the knee, and was amputated immediately. Just then the English cavalry charged down, so Larrey picked up his instruments, placed Silly on his shoulders, and ran into a field planted with caper bushes on ridges between ditches, where the cavalry could not follow, and he got back to the rear. Silly recovered quite well, but Larrey noted that he never received any recognition for services rendered!

A chieftain among the Mamelukes had his arm smashed by a cannon-ball after the battle of Heliopolis. When Larrey approached with his knife he bowed his head in the belief that it was his head which was to be cut off. He explained that he had never heard of amputations. Amputation at the shoulder-joint was performed, and he had healed when handed over twenty-five days later.

One may collect the results of immediate amputations scattered through his books, and, adding them together, say that he was successful in more than three-quarters of his amputations. Of those that died, some did so as the result of concurrent injuries, some during convalescence, especially during the retreat of the French Armies.

The actual cutting time in performing these amputations was incredibly short; eleven seconds for a shoulder, and twenty seconds for a hip disarticulation.

In digression, it is of interest to know that in the days which I am discussing, musketry fire produced a smashing effect up to 30-40 metres, and ceased to be effectual at 250 metres. Cannons ceased to cause more than contusions at 1,000 metres.

As to other treatments employed, all punctured wounds were freely incised and drained; fractures were promptly reduced and immobilized by a fixed apparatus. In gunshot wounds and burns, Larrey practiced débridement, the value of which we now more fully appreciate. The actual cautery was used in

cases of hospital gangrene, the glowing iron being applied until healthy tissue was exposed. In presence of infection the wounds were treated with liquor sodæ chlorinatæ, a term peculiarly familiar when we recall the formula of Dakin's solution, but ordinary wounds were dressed with saline lotion, in contrast with the greases, ointments and elaborate dressings of that period. He was insistent upon rest for all wounds, by not too frequent dressings. In 1794 Larrey was appointed Chief Surgeon to the Army that was intended for Corsica. During the few days he remained in Paris he found time to marry. The honeymoon was spent largely in a stage coach, as he had been ordered to join the Army of the South at Toulon. Here he met for the first time an undersized, pale, long-haired, reserved, and almost emaciated artillery officer, twenty-five years old and named Napoleon Bonoparte.

The presence of the English fleet prevented the French from reaching Corsica, so Larrey spent some time in Nice with the Army of the Maritime Alps. At this time, he formulated his views on the treatment of the apparently drowned, advocating a form of artificial respiration, that consisted in blowing into the mouth to distend the lungs and pressing on the chest to empty them. He also interested himself in teaching military and naval surgeons, giving courses in anatomy, and theoretical and clinical surgery.

Then after a short service in Spain, Larrey returned to Paris, and opened a school for teaching anatomy, physiology and practical surgery. His fame as a lecturer reached the Government, at that time the Committee of Public Safety, and he was appointed Professor of Surgery and Anatomy in the Military School of Medicine at the Vâl de Grâce.

In May, 1797, Larrey set out as Chief Surgeon of the Army of Italy, which had recently been placed under the command of General Bonoparte.

Since Napoleon and Larrey had met for the first time at Toulon, the former had gone through many trials, and had achieved some notable triumphs. He had lost his commission, had been harrassed by poverty, had walked along the streets contemplating suicide, and had thought of going to Turkey to fight under the Sultan. In a critical moment, when all others were afraid, he had accepted the command of Paris from Barras, and had defeated the National Guard, which had come 30,000 strong to attack the Convention. As a reward for this achievement the command of the Army in Italy had been given him. At the age of 28 years this remarkable man had won a coveted object of his ambition, the command of an active army, about to enter a campaign.

The difference between travel then and now is well exemplified by the fact that the surgeon had to wait forty-eight days at the foot of Mont Cenis, owing to snow drifts and avalanches. While among the Alps, he was much impressed by the cases of goitre and cretinism he saw, and attributed the condition to the drinking of snow-water.

He visited most of the towns of Northern Italy establishing schools of military surgery.

He was particularly interested in Venice, a city then noted for its gaiety, its luxury, and its indolence. Larrey's account shows that the well-to-do residents of Venice had a reasonably comfortable life. The custom of a fashionable Venetian was to rise from bed between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, to pass the remainder of daylight in his apartments clad only in a morning robe, to take a light meal, then to array himself in his finest and walk to the Square of St. Mark's, or some adjacent island, to idle about for a time, to go to dinner, and then to the theatre, which did not begin till nine o'clock and did not finish until about one o'clock in the morning. After leaving the theatre, he could pay any ceremonial call he had to make, going from place to place in a gondola, keeping on paying visits to five or six a.m., and then going home to bed. The law forced the working man, whose occupation produced noise, to live in a remote section of the town, so that the day slumbers of the illustrious personages might not be disturbed.

At the end of this Italian war, the triumph of Bonoparte was complete. He had made France supreme in Italy to the exclusion of Austria.

In 1798 Larrey was ordered to Toulon with directions to prepare to assume the position of Surgeon in Chief to the expedition that was to go to Egypt under General Bonoparte.

Napoleon had been invited by the Directory to attack England. He preferred to assail that enemy by an attack on Egypt, thinking that having conquered that country, he would create an Eastern Empire; perhaps march on India, perhaps on Constantinople and bring the shop-keeping island to beggary by the destruction of its trade. "You are," he said to his army as he embarked at Toulon, "one of the wings of the Army of England."

Larrey was successful in obtaining Surgeons from the schools of medicine at Toulouse and Montpelier. So readily did professional men respond to the call made, that he was able to reckon on about eight hundred well equipped Surgeons, of whom many had served in the Army of Italy. The expedition embarked on 13th May, 1798.

Larrey participated in all the dangers and troubles of this harrassing campaign. At Acre he was wounded and Napoleon complimented him in public, on his gallantry and usefulness. After the battle Napoleon presented Larrey with a sword of honour, on account of his having operated in the very midst of the conflict on one of his best Generals, General Fouqières. This operation was an amputation at the shoulder-joint, and was done by the method that we still call "Larrey's Amputation." Larrey wore this sword nearly all the rest of his military life. When he was captured at Waterloo, it was stolen from him by the Prussians.

On one occasion during this campaign the men were obliged to kill their horses to make soup of them, Larrey, in speaking of a later campaign, tells of flavouring soup with gunpowder, as a substitute for salt.

In this Egyptian Campaign, the Medical Officers were at first confused because plague occurred with pneumonia—pneumonic plague. In one plague

hospital within eight weeks every hospital attendant, three physicians, fourteen surgeons and eleven apothecaries died. As for the hospital orderlies, they were nearly all criminals, who, having escaped from the galleys, were drawn to hospital work by the prospect of robbing the sick. By the end of the siege of Acre most of them were ill or dead.

Larrey was soon able to draw up some excellent rules for the medical officers. When entering the hospital, he was to put on a linen overall, damped with vinegar and water; this included a covering for the head and a mask. Also he was to put on sandals or sabots, which had been dipped in solutions of turpentine or spirit. He should wash his hands and dip them in vinegar and water before operating, and on leaving he should wash his hands and any other exposed part. His linen overall should be washed and placed in the open air, also his shoes and his instruments, after washing these with brandy. Larrey was constantly in the very midst of the plague, but he never took the disease.

The journal of Larrey's Campaign in Egypt and Syria is rich in striking incidents. He shows us how afraid the soldiers were of being bitten by scorpions, and yet that the bites were not dangerous, that he trephined a number of cases, and warmly advocated operation for meningeal hæmorrhage, recording successful cases. He describes cases in which leeches lodged in the nose and naso-pharynx, and remained there for weeks before the condition was understood, producing exhausting hæmorrhage. He blames bad water for liver abscess; and also for "nervous putrid fever with bloody fluxes," which was probably typhoid. Tetanus seems to have been a veritable scourge among the French, killing many men. He insisted on the causative influence of a wound in this disease. He tells us that at the Siege of Acre, two hip-joint amputations were performed. Larrey advocated this operation, in spite of Pott's view "that it is a bloody, dreadful, and unjustifiable procedure." He tells us that the wounds often became full of maggots, and speaks of abscess of the liver, and says there were many cures. His rule was to open it when it had become glued to the surface. He also described "Egyptian ophthalmia" which caused many cases of blindness. This was obviously trachoma. Descriptions are also given of rib resection for the drainage of empyema of the chest, and he also stresses the relationship between aneurisms and syphilis, for which he recommended inunction with Mercury.

Larrey returned to Toulon on the 24th December, 1801.

Soon after he arrived in Paris, and commenced a course of lectures to a very large number of students; it is interesting to find that at that early day he was lecturing on Experimental Surgery, a branch that for many years after was rarely taught or thought about.

Larrey had remained in the East for a long time after Napoleon's return.

During Napoleon's absence the Directory which was governing France had with success endeavoured to establish republican governments in the countries surrounding France. Holland, Northern Italy, Genoa and Switzerland had all

modelled on the French Government and were allied with France. The Monarchs of Europe were once more stirred into action. Austria agreed to take the field again, while the Tsar of Russia and the Sultan of Turkey, who were impressed by the presence of Napoleon in the Eastern Mediterranean, agreed to help.

So, when Napoleon returned in 1799, he found a very different state of affairs than had existed before his departure to Egypt. The Austrians had driven the French out of Germany, a Russian Army had been sent to help the Austrians and had forced the French out of Italy; the Russians had, however, been recalled, and the Tsar withdrew from the coalition on account of misunderstandings with the Austrians. Therefore, in 1800 Napoleon decided to attack the latter in two directions: one, by an army which he sent to the Rhine, and another which he himself led over the Alps into Italy. He encountered the Austrian Armies at Marengo in Northern Italy in 1800 and gained a decisive victory, which was supplemented in December by an equally brilliant victory for the Rhine Army at Hohenlinden in Germany.

"On Linden when the sun was low
All bloodless, lay the untrodden snow."

Larrey was not present at these battles, as he had not returned from the East.

With regard to the sole remaining enemy, Great Britain, the position was impossible of definite solution; the British navy was supreme on the sea and England could not be invaded, and, since both countries were exhausted, a temporary peace was made by the signing of the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. This Treaty proved to be merely a temporary truce and a coalition was formed against France, which included Austria, Russia, Sweden as well as Britain.

As soon as this coalition was established in 1805, Napoleon gave up his idea of attacking England, and turned his army on the Austrians, defeating one of their armies decisively at Ulm in Bavaria, in the same week as Nelson defeated the French Navy at Trafalgar. Later in the year, on 2nd December, he met an army of Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz and won one of his most notable victories.

Prussia at this point realized the danger to German independence which Napoleon's successes entailed, and, not waiting for Russian assistance which was on the way, declared war on France. The Prussians were utterly routed at Jena on 14th October, 1806, and their military prestige was completely shattered.

The battle of Austerlitz was the greatest victory that Napoleon ever won. The direction of the Medical Corps of the Army was in the hands of Larrey. The night before the battle, the Emperor, without warning, rode along the French line. Larrey tells us that the Army "was electrified by his presence. By a unanimous and spontaneous motion, the whole army grasped wisps of straw and set them on fire; and in a moment, you beheld a new kind of illumination, symmetrical and brilliant by more than 45,000 men." Larrey in his memoirs states that he established a field hospital in a granary, and that all the wounded, friend and foe alike, were operated upon, their wounds dressed and in hospitals in less than twenty-four hours. An epidemic of what Larrey called "a malignant, nervous

and putrid hospital fever" developed and caused the death of many of the wounded. In this account, given at some length, Larrey unquestionably describes typhoid fever.

After these victorious battles the Emperor marched his army into Berlin, where Larrey met many distinguished physicians and scientists, including Humboldt, the great explorer.

He comments on the ravages caused by syphilis in the French Army.

There now remained the Tsar to be dealt with and in East Prussia the great battles of Eylau and Friedland were fought. The battle of Eylau was fought on 8th February, 1807, in a snowstorm. Larrey noted that the temperature was zero Fahrenheit. He worked all day and the following night with his feet in the snow. The dead and dying were stripped by the survivors to get clothing and boots. The wolves came out from the neighbouring forests, as depicted in the painting in the Salon of 1901, called "L'Heure des Fauves."

By the Treaty of Tilsit which ensued, Prussia lost half her territory, and had to submit to various humiliating conditions, whilst Russia escaped easily and indeed got share of the spoils. Napoloen was now at the zenith of his power. After these battles Larrey was made Commander of the Legion of Honour.

At this point in his Memoirs, there is a treatise on dry gangrene of the feet, and also a description of anthrax, which he thought came from eating the meat of animals that had the disease. In this campaign also, for the second time Larrey made a counter opening in the cranium to reach a bullet. He introduced a gum-elastic catheter as a probe, and trephined over the point of it. He found a flattened bullet on the inside of the bone.

I will not weary you with Larrey's return to Paris, and stories of campaigns in the Peninsular War, except to relate the interesting casualty of Marshal Lannes, Duke of Montebello, Napoleon's foremost General. The Marshal's horse fell down a mountain, and as a consequence Lannes was severely bruised about the thorax and abdomen, seemed to be gravely injured, and appeared to be dying. Larrey got a large sheep and had it stunned by a sudden blow on the neck, and two butchers quickly skinned it. Whilst this was being done, the Duke was greased all over with camphorated oil of camomile. His body was then completely wrapped in the skin of the sheep, which had been taken warm from its back. The reeking skin was fastened together at its edges, so as to completely surround the injured man's body. His extremities were wrapped in warm flannel, and the Marshal was allowed to take a light tea with lemon-juice and sugar. Ten minutes after its application he went to sleep, and next day, although his urine contained quantities of blood, he felt much better, and went on duty on the fifth day, being able to ride a horse.

Spain was not alone in the experience of having national feeling aroused by Napoleon's despotism. The Emperor Francis of Austria longed for revenge and Austria declared war in 1809. After the desperate battle of Aspern, near Vienna, from the field of which the French had to fall back, and in which Marshal

Lannes was killed, and of which in soliloquy Napoleon is reputed to have said, "Has Achilles heel indeed been hit," the next battle was the tremendous conflict of Wagram, ten miles from Vienna, upon which the fate of the French Empire was staked and won. It was after this fight that Larrey was made a Baron of the Empire, and was granted a pension of five thousand francs.

During 1810 and 1811 there was a pause of exhaustion, throughout the centre of the Continent, whilst the commercial blockade, aimed by Napoleon against the staying power of Britain, slowly but surely crumbled, as the Tsar grew more sceptical of Napoleon's final success, and eventually it came to the point that Napoleon must either abandon his scheme or fight Russia.

In June, 1812, after securing the neutrality of Austria and Prussia, Napoleon accumulated a vast force of more than half a million men, and started on the ill-fated advance to Moscow, reaching that town in September.

Larrey, in the following words, gives a most vivid description of the burning of Moscow and the subsequent retreat:—"It would be difficult to imagine a more horrible picture than the burning of Moscow on 18th and 19th September, 1812. Dry and fine weather aggravated the conflagration. The whole city was enveloped. The sudden explosions of magazines and oil reservoirs added to the horror of the picture, which struck terror to all hearts; soldiers and civilians alike. The soldiers were evacuated, but I remained with some comrades in a strong house near the Kremlin.

"The citizens, who were left in the city, were caught in the conflagration, and rushed about wildly from house to house — women carrying children on their shoulders, running to escape death, which threatened them from all directions. I saw old men their beards alight, seated on carts, drawn by relatives endeavouring to rescue them from the inferno. In eight to ten days this great city was reduced to ashes, with the exception of the Kremlin and a few stone churches."

The stores that Napoleon counted on finding in Moscow were practically all burned, and the army faced a retreat without definite means of procuring more. The cold grew intense, and gradually ambulances, artillery wagons, etc., were all sacrificed in the bivouac fires. To stumble or fall in the line of march was almost certain death; some one in the ranks would stagger and fall; to come to his relief was impossible for his weakened and almost frozen companions. Larrey owed his life to his walking, and not attempting to ride, and to the affection the common soldier had for him. It is an interesting fact that in spite of deaths from privation and fatigue, a major enemy which mowed down the retreating army was an epidemic of typhus fever.

Following the retreat from Moscow the days of Napoleon's sweeping victories were over, and he would have done well to accept the suggestion by Austria, that peace should be made on terms which would restore complete independence and integrity to Austria and the German States. But Napoleon would have none of it; he still believed in himself and his destiny, and rejected all offers of peace.

In October, 1813, he was hemmed in by the armies of Russia, Prussia and Austria, and was utterly defeated at Leipzig, the "Battle of the Nations." The Allies at length entered Paris in triumph in April, 1814, and Napoleon was forced to abdicate, and retire to the island of Elba.

When the order to send the Emperor to Elba was given Larrey begged to be taken along; but Napoleon would not let him go, telling him that the army needed his services, and that it was his duty to stay with it, and finally bade him adieu. Larrey returned to Paris, but service under the Bourbons was distasteful, and on the sudden return of Napoleon in March, 1815, he resumed his old role of Surgeon-in-Chief to the Army. On 7th June he joined the army in the field, and was present at the sanguinary battles of Ligny and Waterloo. During the great battles of the 18th June, Larrey established his ambulances at Caillou, and subsequently at the farm of La Belle Alliance, places which any of you who may have visited the battlefield, will readily remember.

He had been operating without intermission from mid-day until eight o'clock in the evening, when on the debacle taking place, the Emperor directed him to withdraw his ambulances, and make for the frontier. Larrey started off with some of his surgeons, when they were overtaken by some Prussian Cavalry; he discharged his pistols at them and they replied with their muskets, with the result that Larrey's horse was wounded; it fell, bringing down the rider, and whilst on the ground he received two sabre cuts, which rendered him insensible. On regaining his senses he endeavoured to reach French soil on foot, but was then taken prisoner by the Prussians, who robbed him of his arms, watch, ring and the sword which Napoleon had given him, finally bringing him before a senior officer, who sentenced him to be shot. From this fate he was saved by a Prussian Surgeon-Major, who recognised him as the lecturer in surgery in Berlin in 1812. Eventually he was released by Blücher, whose son he had befriended in former days, when wounded, and was sent to Brussels. Larrey returned to Paris, where he was deprived of his rank and pension by the Bourbons. In 1818, however, his pension was restored, and he was at the same time nominated Surgeon of the Royal Guard.

Napoleon died in 1821, and Larrey was plunged into grief at the death of his old Chief. He was greatly touched to learn that the Emperor had spoken of him in his will; and had referred to him as "the most virtuous man that I have ever known," and had bequeathed him 10,000 francs as a souvenir of undying affection. Nineteen years afterwards, when the Emperor's remains were brought home to Paris from St. Helena, an erect and fresh-looking man, wearing the uniform of the Imperial Guard he had worn at Wagram, followed the remains of Napoleon to his tomb.

In 1826 Larrey took a trip to England and was received with the greatest distinction by many eminent men, including Astley Cooper and Sir Walter Scott. At this time he also visited Dublin, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

In the Revolution of July, 1830, which overthrew Charles X, he personally directed the care of the wounded.

Finally, in 1842, when aged 76, Larrey was sent to Algeria, where there had been serious trouble among the young conscripts, forced upon a foreign service without adequate pay. The military had unfortunately borrowed from Oriental barbarism the pits or silos in which the recruits were buried up to their necks as punishment. Larrey declared to the military officers that such punishments dishonoured humanity; punishment out of proportion to the faults, only hardened the hearts of undisciplined soldiers.

On his journey home, Larrey suffered for the first time from fatigue; on landing in France he heard of the illness of his wife, and so hurried, travelling by night as well as day. But he developed pneumonia, and on arriving at Lyons died on 25th July, 1842, his wife dying in Paris a few days before him.

In 1850, a statue was set up to the memory of Baron Larrey in the grand court yard of Vâl de Grâce—the military school of medicine.

This ceremony was an event of national importance, and the eulogies of the great man were pronounced by many, eminent in science or high in army or Government circles. Among the speakers was Roux, representing the Academy of Sciences. His estimate of Larrey is interesting. He calls him the hero of humanity, the idol of the French soldier, and, in quoting the famous words of Napoleon's will, "Larrey is the most virtuous, the most upright man that I have ever known," recalls that Marcus Aurelius used almost identical language in regard to Galen. On the professional side, he credits Larrey with great ability as a military medical officer, as an organizer, as a pioneer in the adequate and systematic relief of the wounded. He calls attention to Larrey's use of the word débridement (a word often heard to-day) in gunshot wounds, to his fine work in the treatment of fractures, his belief in the prompt amputation of limbs, when the destruction of tissue has been excessive, his method of disarticulation at hip and shoulder, and his ambulances volantes.

A French writer, moralizing on the life of the Duke of Wellington, concluded his essay by asserting that the greatest legacy the Duke had bequeathed was "the contemplation of his character." May I add this aphorism to the subject of my sketch, and express the opinion that Dominique Jean Larrey has, in the same sense, left a valuable legacy of service to humanity, and that he was a brave, truthful and loyal man and a benefactor to the human race.

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